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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>410 E Street, NE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>December 20, 2012</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>12-616</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Amanda Molson and Andrew Lewis</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The Department of General Services, with plans prepared by Hughes Group Architects, requests concept approval for side and rear additions to Stuart Hobson Middle School, along with the removal of the school's damaged smokestack. The property is located at 410 E Street, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

### Property Description

Stuart Hobson Middle School occupies an entire city square surrounded by E Street, F Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The school was constructed in 1927, with a classroom wing and a gymnasium added in the 1930s on the east and north sides of the school. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets slope downwards generously towards the north. As a result, a retaining wall supports the parking lot and play fields abutting F Street. Interior modifications and minor exterior alterations to the school were reviewed and approved by HPO and have been underway for several months.

### Proposal

The applicants propose the removal of the school's original smokestack, which was heavily damaged by the earthquake and has been braced since that time. On the north side of the school, a one-story service addition would be constructed next to the outdoor field. The service addition would provide a loading ramp, staircase, and elevator to the existing basement level of the school, along with enclosing mechanical equipment.

The more substantial portion of the project is a proposed three-story addition to house the school's Arts Integration and Museum Program. The addition would be sited along 4<sup>th</sup> Street, in the area currently occupied by a paved area and gym equipment. Housing classroom and performance space for art and museum studies, drama, and music, the addition would be connected to the existing school on all levels. A green roof, surrounded by a parapet wall, would be installed as part of the project's sustainability efforts and as a teaching opportunity.

The applicant has selected a contemporary design that reads as distinct from the historic school building and expressive of the creative uses planned for the space. The addition has been visually detached from the northwest face of the building through the employment of a series of stacked, horizontal panels that read as a connecting element. The height of the addition has been

held below the projecting cornice of the main block, and the sloping grade allows the ground floor of the addition to be set below that of the main block in order to bring down the height. The cladding material would be thin masonry panels in a buff tone. The fenestration is proposed as somewhat randomized sections of clear glass interspersed with etched glass, all recessed a few inches from the building face. The panes are interlaced with projecting horizontal and vertical aluminum mullions, which provide shade and add color.

In addition to providing classroom space, the new addition is envisioned as a major point of entry to the school. Cars routinely drop off students along 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and the proposal includes a new covered entryway, sign, deck area, and garden space.

### **Evaluation**

Unlike the highly articulated smokestacks used at some historic schools, the smokestack at Stuart Hobson is quite simple in design. It is comprised of several angled walls and has no decorative brick coursing or other architectural features. The smokestack will no longer be in use, and the repair costs of stabilizing it are substantial. In addition to retaining and repairing the smokestack, HPO was presented with two additional options – remove the top half of the smokestack and repair the bottom half, or remove the smokestack altogether. Given that the smokestack is not a major architectural feature of the school and that keeping the truncated lower half of the smokestack might prove more visually distracting than helpful in understanding its original purpose, HPO is comfortable with its removal altogether.

The north service addition is deferential to the much larger massing of the school. It is logically sited in an area occupied by parking and play fields, as opposed to becoming a prominent elevation of the building. HPO has also worked with the applicants on the replacement of the front doors using a historic photograph. This will be a welcome improvement over the rather austere current condition.

HPO has reviewed several iterations of the larger addition along 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The location and overall massing of the addition have remained the same, and these have been consistently compatible. The open space on 4<sup>th</sup> Street is a logical location for an expansion, and the height and footprint are suitably subordinate to the school. The use of a visual connecting piece between the northwest corner of the school and the new addition avoids an awkward meeting point of two different materials and two different heights without relief.

The general material treatment has also been unchanged since the earliest iterations. The proposed cladding is of a color similar to the limestone water table, belt courses, and door surrounds of the historic school. The renderings submitted for Board consideration cast a pinkish hue on both the water table and the addition, so it will be critical for the applicants to share material samples with the Board during the hearing. Additionally, the renderings suggest the panels will be very large expanses of masonry, and it is not clear whether these might perhaps be further subdivided to break down the facade.

The most significant changes have been to the pattern of fenestration, which originally included a very large curtain wall of glass wrapping the northwest corner of the addition. Following comments from HPO and others, the fenestration was reduced in scale, distributed more widely,

and regularized. Additionally, the proposal originally extended the fenestration into the parapet wall surrounding the green roof. The fenestration has since been pulled off the parapet, allowing the parapet itself to read as a cornice element. The reasoning for highlighting the stair corridor with a wrapped window is not entirely clear, but it does create a strong corner element that focuses attention on the new entrance. Some additional study should be devoted to the distribution of clear vs. etched glass, as it is somewhat difficult to perceive the intended pattern in the renderings.

The covered entrance, sign, and garden areas will make a positive contribution to an area that is currently paved. However, the plans show a composite deck planned for the area around the entrance, as opposed to extending the permeable pavers from entry walk into this area. The idea of a deck, particularly so close to the street and therefore quite visible, is suburban in nature and does not demonstrate any relationship to a 1920s historic school. While a gathering point for students and teachers is certainly appropriate, the permeable pavers should be extended into this area, possibly with a change in size or color to differentiate this area from the walkway. There are also two winding garden walls shown off the deck area, but there are no elevation drawings to clarify what their “low” height will actually be. Further detail should be provided in the final plans.

The applicants should also provide further drawings of the proposed columns bordering the gate on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. They appear in some renderings to be even taller than the fence proposed for the periphery of the property, and there is no representation of their design. Any architectural elements along the fence line should be held to no taller than the fence itself and of very simple design, commensurate with the low and open nature of retaining walls and fencing in the historic district and with the residential character of 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NE.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff, with the condition that further study is given to the glazing in the new addition and landscape features along 4<sup>th</sup> Street.*